

VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

WASHINGTON STATE CURRICULUM GRADES 8-12

TEACHER: LESSON 1

THEME: BALLOTS, POLLS & VOTING BOOTHS

"The hottest places in Hades are reserved for those who, in times of great moral crisis, remain neutral."
(Dante)

ACTIVITY:

To cast a vote on an issue or for a candidate is to take a position; it is not to remain neutral. Even to those who have not yet voted, the terms "ballot," "polling place," and "voting booth" are not unfamiliar. Students have probably heard and read of them in the news and in civics and history classes. Yet many may not yet have a clear mental picture of what it would feel like to cast a PERSONAL ballot, enter a polling place or step into the voting booth for the first time.

Few could imagine several decades ago that the nature of voting would change in so many ways -- in so many ways but one: it is still a personal decision; it still takes a commitment; it still depends on each citizen to make democracy work. This role of the individual in renewing the vision that began in our 1787 Constitution cannot be altered no matter how the process of voting changes.

This activity is intended to give students a clearer picture of what a ballot can look like, in the past and present. It will acquaint them with the variety of polling places and voting booths, in the U.S. and elsewhere, past and present. It is hoped that familiarization will lead them to be more comfortable with the process and then to exercise their political right as soon as they are 18 years old!

Through an analysis of only visual images, students will notice that we as a democracy have a common bond with so many nations and people, which is the profoundly powerful desire and power to influence our futures by the act of voting. Secondly, they will encounter the changes to the voting process, all designed to make the act of voting more available and the results more reliable.

This activity will call upon students' powers of observation and their abilities to derive learning non-verbally. These images are best seen digitally. You can use a digital projector and a computer to project them, have students go to the web site in a lab or library or you can save the images to a disc and load them to each computer's hard drive. If you choose to print and duplicate the student lesson with photos, make the copies light enough so the details in the photos are clear.

The activity is in two parts and employs both a visual experience and a subsequent written analysis. Students can work individually in class or at home; they could also do this in pairs. Collaboration on the questions might create a desirable symbiosis in which each insight by one student leads to further insights by the other. For Student Activity (C), you might opt to use the questions as a basis for a class discussion rather than as a writing assignment.

See Student Activities (A), (B) and (C). Make enough copies for each student.

As an enrichment or extension activity, students can get more information on the possible alternative of voting via the Internet, by going to www.secstate.wa.gov, click on "Elections and Voting," then select "Examining Internet Voting in the State of Washington."